4 PART MINI-SERIES

DON McGREGOR GENE COLAN

$2.00
$2.75 CAN
NOV 1985
NO 3

NATHANIEL DUSK

PRIVATE INVESTIGATOR II

APPLE PEDDLERS DIE AT NOON—PART 3

NATHANIEL DUSK II

"Apple Peddlers Die at Noon"

Part 3

Don McGregor
Writer

Gene Colan
Artist

Tom Ziuko
Colorist

John Costanza
Letterer

Jenette Kahn, President and Publisher
Dick Giordano, Vice Pres.-Executive Editor
Don McGregor, Editor
Barbara Randall, Assoc. Editor
Richard Bruning, Art Director
Tom Condon, Managing Editor
Pat Bastienne, Editorial Coordinator
Bob Rozakis, Production Manager
Paul Levitz, Executive Vice President
Joe Orlando, Vice Pres.-Creative Director
Ed Shukin, Vice Pres.-Circulation
Bruce Bristow, Marketing Director
Patrick Caldon, Controller

DC Comics Inc
666 Fifth Ave.
New York, NY 10103

I COULD HARDLY HEAR THE MACHINE GUN STUTTER OVER THE NOONTIME NOISE OF LUNCHTIME 5TH AVENUE..

--BUT THE VEHEMENT PERFORATION OF METAL WAS A CACOPHONY RIPPING APART MY BRAIN.

IT WAS A SOUND THAT SAID UNDENIABLY, THAT IF THESE BULLETS COULD DO THIS TO METAL--

--WHAT CHANCE DID MERE FLESH HAVE?

THE BUS ROOFTOP WAS NOT WIDE OR LONG ENOUGH.

RIPPP

RIPPP

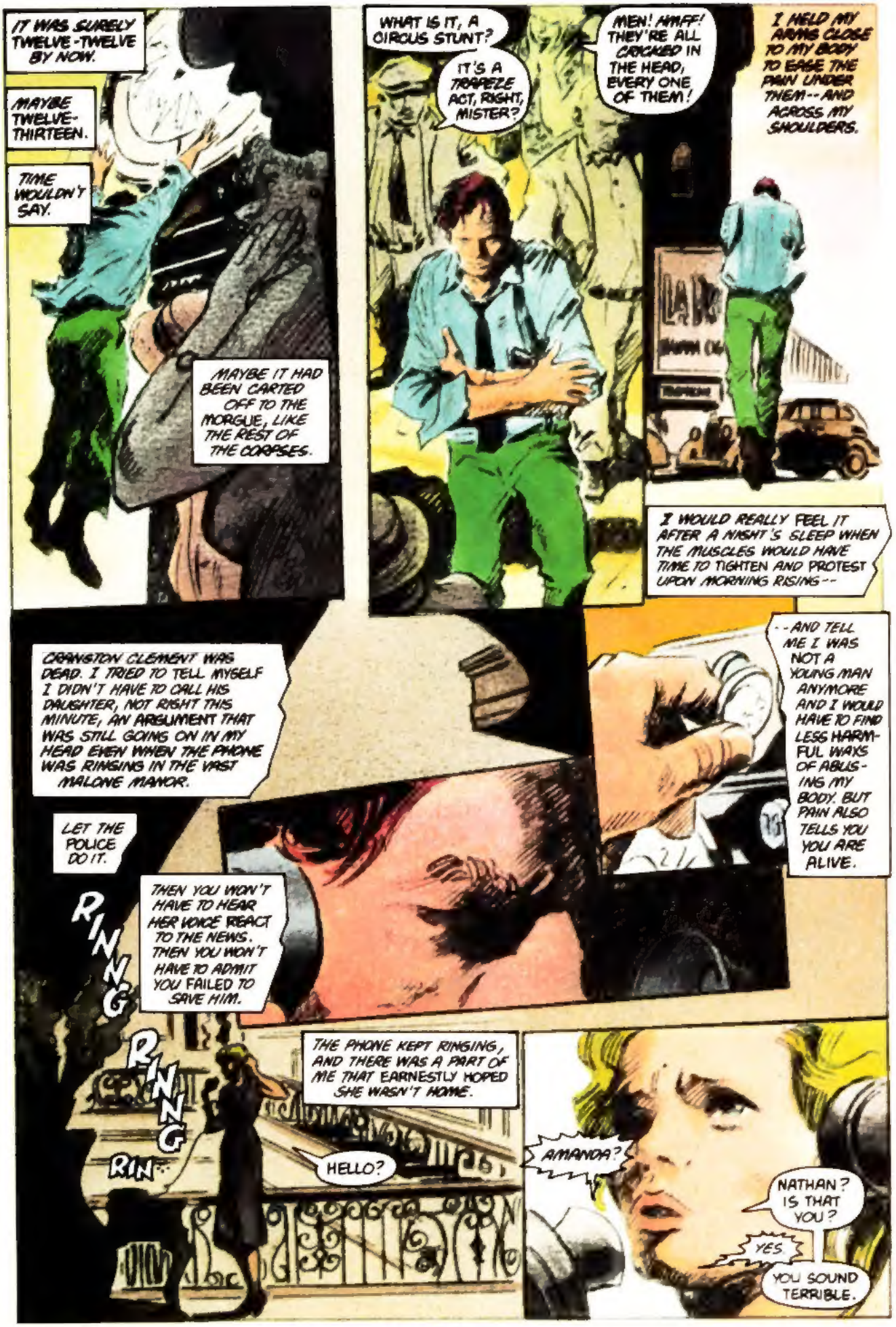
RIPPP

RIPPP

NATHANIEL DUSK II 3 Published monthly and Copyright © 1985 DC Comics, Inc., 666 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10103. All Rights Reserved. The stories, characters and incidents mentioned in this magazine are entirely fictional. All characters featured in this issue and the distinctive likenesses thereof are trademarks of DC Comics Inc. Printed in Canada.
DC Comics Inc. A Warner Communications Company

WE ALL SPECULATE AT TIMES ON HOW WE MIGHT DIE.
SUFFOCATION.
RIPPP
RIPPP
RIPPP
DISEASE.
WHILE MAKING LOVE.
RIPPP
RIPPP
RIPPP
NOT EVEN MY MOST MORBID IMAGININGS CAME CLOSE TO THIS, NOT EVEN WHEN I HAD FACED ENEMY FIRE DURING THE WAR.
THE 5TH AVENUE CLOCK SAID IT WAS TEN MINUTES AFTER NOON--
RIPPP
RIPPP
RIPPP
--AND IT SEEMED QUITE FEARFULLY PROBABLE THAT THIS COULD BE THE LAST MOMENT OF MY LIFE, THAT BY TWELVE-ELEVEN I WOULD BE COOLING MEAT ON DIRTY, HOT JULY CEMENT!
GET OFF THIS THING!

I GRUNTED, AIR WHOOSHING OUT OF MY LUNGS--
SM -ASSK
--AS I SEIZED THAT CLOCK EDGE AS IF I WERE EMBRACING THAT TWELVE-ELEVEN MOMENT OF LIFE!
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT HAD HAP-PENNED TO THE BUS, AND DION'T CARE.
I HELD THE MOMENT AS IF I COULD LOSE IT--
--LOSE IT THE WAY I HAD LOST YOUTH, JOYCE, LIZZIE, TOO MANY OTHERS.
THE HUGE HANDS OF TIME BLURRED BEFORE MY EYES, AS IF TIME WERE NO LONGER A CONCRETE CONCEPT--
--AS IF IT, TOO, COULD BE MURDERED!
MY ARMS FELT LIKE THEY MIGHT BE YANKED FROM MY BODY. SURELY THEY WOULD BE TORN AND I WOULD CRASH LIMBLESS TO THE SIDEWALK, WHILE MY HANDS REMAINED ABOVE, CLUTCHING TIME.
I HAD A BRIEF IMAGE OF MYSELF GAZING UPWARD TO SEE TORN MUSCLE DRIPPING OBSCENELY PAST BLOODIED, JAGGED EDGES OF SNAPPED BONE, JUST ABOUT WHERE MY ARMPITS HAD BEEN.
I DION'T CARE MUCH FOR THE TRAIN OF THOUGHT MY BRAIN WAS TAKING.


IT WAS SURELY TWELVE-TWELVE BY NOW.
MAYBE TWELVE-THIRTEEN.
TIME WOULDN'T SAY.
MAYBE IT HAD BEEN CARTED OFF TO THE MORGUE, LIKE THE REST OF THE CORPSES.
WHAT IS IT, A CIRCUS STUNT?
IT'S A TRAPEZE ACT, RIGHT, MISTER?
MEN! AHHFF! THEY'RE ALL CRACKED IN THE HEAD, EVERY ONE OF THEM!
I HELD MY ARMS CLOSE TO MY BODY TO EASE THE PAIN UNDER THEM--AND ACROSS MY SHOULDERS.
I WOULD REALLY FEEL IT AFTER A NIGHT'S SLEEP WHEN THE MUSCLES WOULD HAVE TIME TO TIGHTEN AND PROTEST UPON MORNING RISING--
--AND TELL ME I WAS NOT A YOUNG MAN ANYMORE AND I WOULD HAVE TO FIND LESS HARMFUL WAYS OF ABUSING MY BODY. BUT PAIN ALSO TELLS YOU YOU ARE ALIVE.
CRAWSTON CLEMENT WAS DEAD. I TRIED TO TELL MYSELF I DIDN'T HAVE TO CALL HIS DAUGHTER, NOT RIGHT THIS MINUTE, AN ARGUMENT THAT WAS STILL GOING ON IN MY HEAD EVEN WHEN THE PHONE WAS RINGING IN THE VAST MALONE MANOR.
LET THE POLICE DO IT.
THEN YOU WON'T HAVE TO HEAR HER VOICE REACT TO THE NEWS. THEN YOU WON'T HAVE TO ADMIT YOU FAILED TO SAVE HIM.
RINNG
RINNG
RIN
THE PHONE KEPT RINGING, AND THERE WAS A PART OF ME THAT EARNESTLY HOPED SHE WASN'T HOME.
HELLO?
AMANDA?
NATHAN? IS THAT YOU?
YES.
YOU SOUND TERRIBLE.

WHAT'S THE MATTER? ARE YOU ALL RIGHT? YOU SOUND OUT OF BREATH.
YEH. I AM.
WHAT'S WRONG? WHY ARE YOU CALLING AT THIS TIME OF THE DAY?
AMANDA... IT'S YOUR--
NO!
NO, DON'T TELL ME.
DON'T SAY IT.
I... I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT.
YEH. I UNDERSTAND. I DIDN'T WANT TO BE THE ONE WHO HAD TO TELL YOU. BUT IT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN RIGHT IF I DIDN'T.
WHEN?
JUST... JUST MINUTES AGO.
WHERE?
AT HIS APPLE STAND NEAR THE HUNGRY UNICORN.
I'LL BE THERE IN TEN MINUTES!
AMANDA, I WOULDN'T RECOMMEND YOU COME DOWN HERE. THEY... SHOT HIM... WITH A THOMPSON SUBMACHINE GUN. THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN...
HE'S MY FATHER! I'LL BE THERE!
CLICK!
YOU MEAN...
CLIK
WAS YOUR FATHER.

THE MOB CROWDED AROUND AS IF IT WERE GIVEAWAY NIGHT AT THE MOVIES. I DON'T KNOW WHY THEY WERE SO DETERMINED TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THE BLOOD COAGULATING ON THE STREET. I TRIED TO LOOK EVERYWHERE ELSE.

I HEARD DILLINGER'S NAME MURMURED A NUMBER OF TIMES.

SOMEONE CLAIMED NEW YORK WAS TURNING INTO CHICAGO, A PLACE FOR GANGLAND SHOOT-OUTS.

THE CROWD SEEMED FASCINATED TO WATCH TIRED, SWEATY MEN WHO HAD SEEN TOO MUCH DEATH SO ABOUT THEIR ROUTINE.

I HAD CALLED LT. MURRAY ABRAHAMS. THIS WASN'T HIS PRECINCT, BUT HE CAME UP ANYWAY, TO MAKE SURE THE UPTOWN BOYS KNEW I WAS JAKE.

HE DIDN'T WISECRACK. HE KNEW HOW I WOULD FEEL ABOUT LOSING A CLIENT.

HEY LADY! WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU'RE...

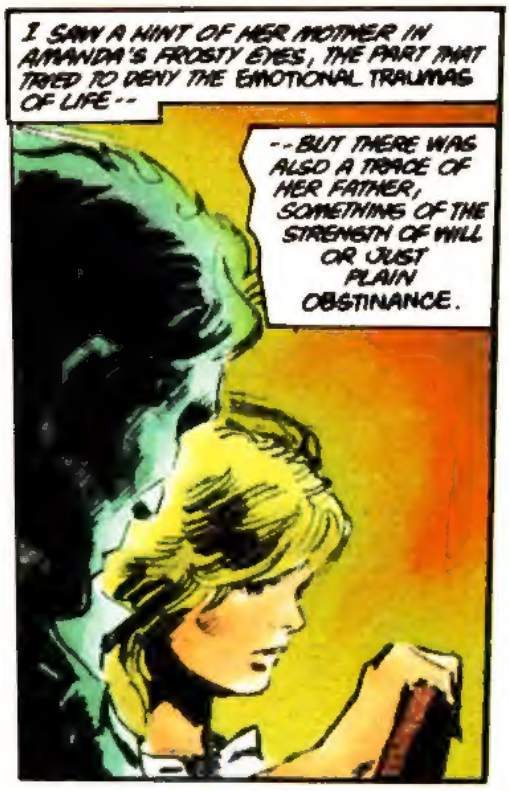
THAT'S MY FATHER LYING THERE!

AMANDA, I TOLD YOU NOT TO...

IT'S OKAY!

I'M OKAY!

IT WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN ANY EASIER IF I HAD TO LOOK AT HIM IN THE MORGUE... JUST A LONGER WAIT.
AND I'D HAVE TO DO IT, MOTHER CERTAINLY WOULDN'T.
I COULD HAVE DONE THE IDENTIFICATION.
HE WAS MY FATHER. IT WAS MY PLACE TO DO IT. I WOULDN'T SHIRK THAT RESPONSIBILITY.
ANYBODY HAVE AN IDEA WHAT WE SHOULD DO WITH HIS CART? CAN WE SCRAP IT?
IT WAS MY FATHER'S PROPERTY. IF YOU DON'T NEED IT, LET ME TAKE IT. YOU CAN STACK IT IN THE BOOT OF MY CAR.
GO AHEAD, BOYS. IT'S NOT PHYSICAL EVIDENCE. NO SENSE LUGGING IT TO THE STATION.
WILL YOU COME WITH ME, NATHAN? EXPLAIN HOW IT HAPPENED... I'M READY TO HEAR IT NOW.
THINK THEY'LL MIND IF I LEAVE, MURRAY?
NAH. THEY DON'T NEED YOU ANYMORE. BEFORE YOU GO, THOUGH, THOUGHT YOU MIGHT WANT TO KNOW, A REPORT CAME IN ON THOSE TWO YOU CHASED. THEY DITCHED THE BUS, ABOUT EIGHT BLOCKS UP FROM YOU. TOOK IT ON THE LAM.
I'LL STOP BY YOUR OFFICE LATER.
GO THROUGH THE LOUSY FILE. SEE IF I CAN SPOT EITHER ONE OF THEM.
SO LONG.


I SAW A HINT OF HER MOTHER IN AMANDA'S FROSTY EYES, THE PART THAT TRIED TO DENY THE EMOTIONAL TRAUMAS OF LIFE--
--BUT THERE WAS ALSO A TRACE OF HER FATHER, SOMETHING OF THE STRENGTH OF WILL OR JUST PLAIN OBSTINANCE.

SHE WAS TRYING TO HANDLE HER FATHER'S DEATH WITH ADULT CALM--
I KNEW IT WAS THE ONLY WAY SHE COULD KEEP THE CHILD FROM SCREAMING INCONSOLABLY.

I WOULDN'T BLAME YOU FOR FEELING ANGRY WITH ME, AMANDA. YOU HIRED ME TO KEEP THIS VERY THING FROM HAPPENING.
NO EXCUSES. NO ALIBIS. I DID WHAT I COULD. ALL HE WOULD LET ME. WHICH WASN'T MUCH.

I KNOW THAT.
I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO BE ABLE TO CHANGE THE WAY HE LIVED.
ALL I CAN THINK OF IS THE WAY HE LOOKED... SO... SO COVERED WITH BLOOD... AND... AND CRUMPLED.

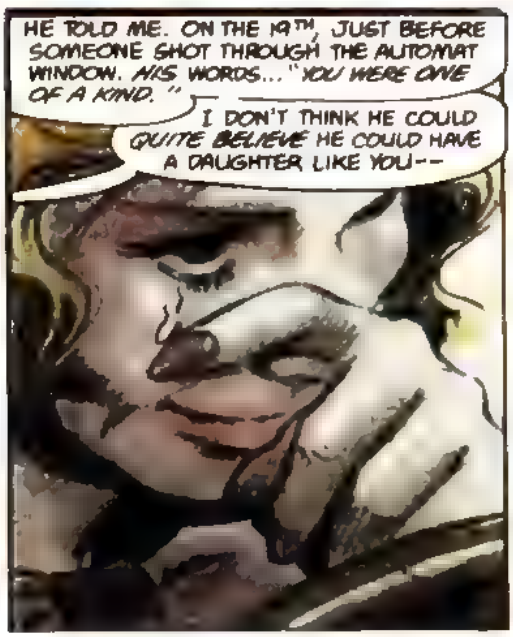
CHRIST!
EVEN WHEN HE LOST IT ALL, THEY NEVER BROKE HIM!
I DON'T WANT TO REMEMBER HIM THIS WAY.
I WANT TO REMEMBER HIM WITH THAT FIERCE, UNCOMPROMISING WILLPOWER WILL LIFE CLEAR IN HIS EYES.

I WANT TO REMEMBER HIM--
--AS THE BASTARD HE COULD BE.
NOT AS SOMEONE REDUCED TO BLOODIED RAGS...
...DEFENSELESS...
...LIFELESS.

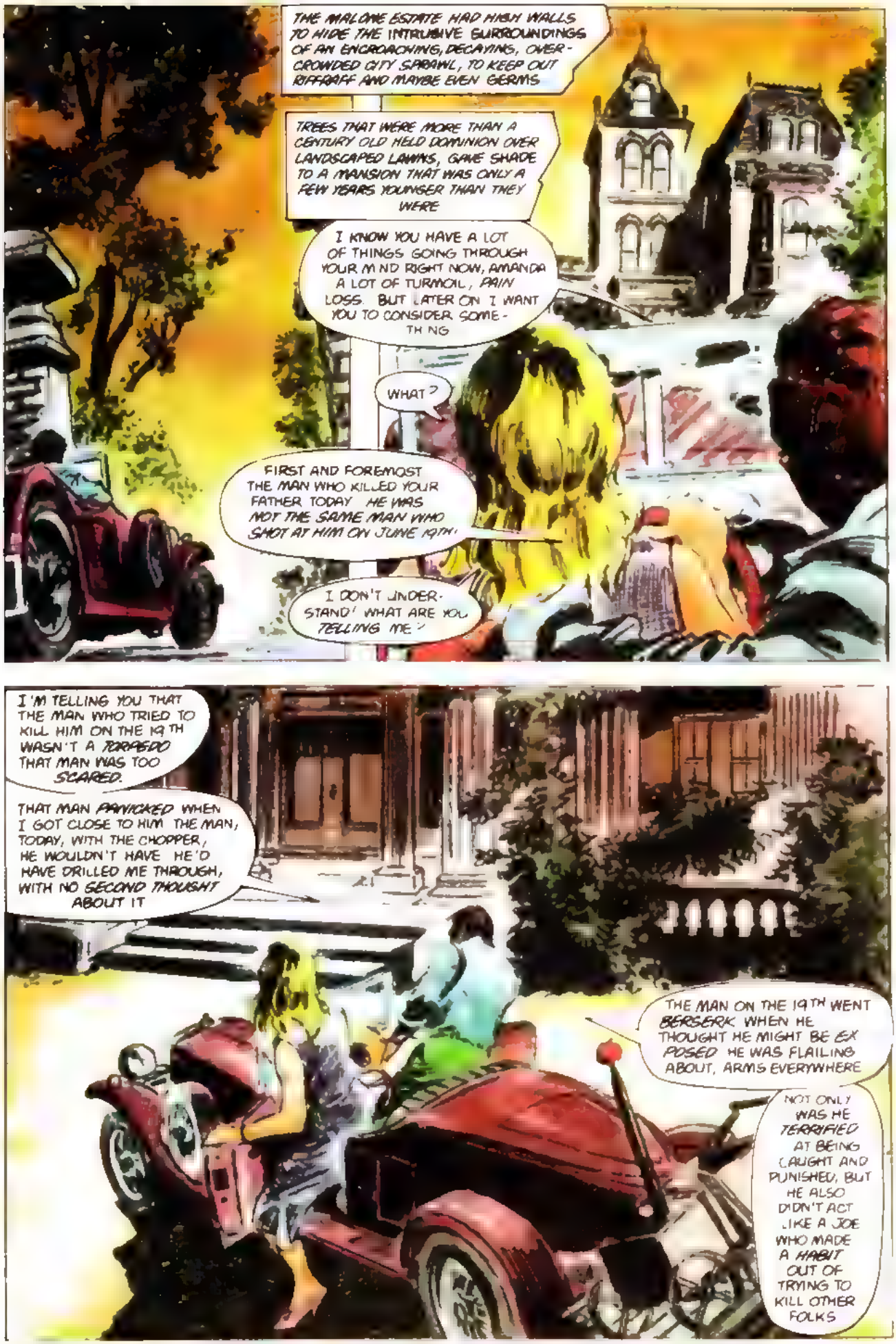
WE'D BEEN OUT AT HIS POST MOST OF THE MORNING. HE ACTUALLY SEEMED CHIPPER. HE WAS POURING ON THE BUS SPIEL, HAWKING HIS APPLES IN HIS MOST ROBUST MANNER.
I'VE SEEN HIM THAT WAY. MY MOTHER WOULD GET SO INFURIATED WITH HIM WHEN HE WAS LIKE THAT.
OH, I KNOW. MY FATHER YOU DIDN'T STAND A CHANCE OF TALKING HIM INTO BEING CAUTIOUS.
I TRIED. BUT I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE BEEN TALKING TO A DEAF MAN. WHAT KEEPS PUZZLING ME IS HE SEEMED SO DAMN SURE THE ATTEMPTS ON HIS LIFE WERE GOING TO STOP. HE WAS CROWING ABOUT SOMETHING OF THAT NATURE.

YES. HE KNEW HOW TO BE AGGRAVATING, IN SPADES.
I REALLY DID LOVE HIM, NATHAN.
ISN'T THAT THE QUEEREST THING?
HMM?
IT EVEN AMAZED HIM.

HOW SO?


HE TOLD ME. ON THE 19TH, JUST BEFORE SOMEONE SHOT THROUGH THE AUTOMAT WINDOW. HIS WORDS... "YOU WERE ONE OF A KIND."
I DON'T THINK HE COULD QUITE BELIEVE HE COULD HAVE A DAUGHTER LIKE YOU--

ONE THAT HE NOT ONLY LOVED--
--BUT ADMIRED


THE MALONE ESTATE HAD HIGH WALLS TO HIDE THE INTRUSIVE SURROUNDINGS OF AN ENCROACHING, DECAYING, OVER-CROWDED CITY SPRAWL, TO KEEP OUT RIFFRAFF AND MAYBE EVEN GERMS
TREES THAT WERE MORE THAN A CENTURY OLD HELD DOMINION OVER LANDSCAPED LAWNS, GAVE SHADE TO A MANSION THAT WAS ONLY A FEW YEARS YOUNGER THAN THEY WERE
I KNOW YOU HAVE A LOT OF THINGS GOING THROUGH YOUR MIND RIGHT NOW, AMANDA A LOT OF TURMOIL, PAIN LOSS. BUT LATER ON I WANT YOU TO CONSIDER SOME-THING
WHAT?
FIRST AND FOREMOST THE MAN WHO KILLED YOUR FATHER TODAY HE WAS NOT THE SAME MAN WHO SHOT AT HIM ON JUNE 19TH!
I DON'T UNDER-STAND! WHAT ARE YOU TELLING ME?
I'M TELLING YOU THAT THE MAN WHO TRIED TO KILL HIM ON THE 19TH WASN'T A TORPEDO THAT MAN WAS TOO SCARED.
THAT MAN PROVOKED WHEN I GOT CLOSE TO HIM THE MAN, TODAY, WITH THE CHOPPER, HE WOULDN'T HAVE HE'D HAVE DRILLED ME THROUGH, WITH NO SECOND THOUGHT ABOUT IT
THE MAN ON THE 19TH WENT BERSERK WHEN HE THOUGHT HE MIGHT BE EXPOSED HE WAS FLAILING ABOUT, ARMS EVERYWHERE
NOT ONLY WAS HE TERRIFIED AT BEING CAUGHT AND PUNISHED, BUT HE ALSO DIDN'T ACT LIKE A JOE WHO MADE A HABIT OUT OF TRYING TO KILL OTHER FOLKS

NOT LIKE THE MEN WHO GUNNED HIM DOWN TODAY. THESE MEN WERE FULL-TIME MOODS. . USED TO JAILS.. FAMILIAR WITH GUNS
THEY'D GET A CHUCKLE OUT OF THE THOUGHT OF USING A SMALL CALIBER WEAPON LIKE THAT FIRST MAN HAD.

YOU CAN TAKE THIS AS A FACT, YOUR FATHER'S KILLER WAS A REAL EXPERT WITH THAT TOMMY-GUN, AND THE DRIVER WAS A PROFESSIONAL GETAWAY MAN.
SO WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN?
MOSTLY IT MEANS I'M GOING AFTER THE MEN WHO KILLED HIM--
--AND NOT JUST THE GUNNY WHO PULLED THE TRIGGER

I'M GOING TO FIND OUT WHY THEY WANTED HIM DEAD SO BAD--
--AND I'M GOING TO MAKE THEM WISH--
--THEY HAD LEFT HIM ALONE!
DON'T THINK I'M HIRING MYSELF FOR A NEW JOB. I'M NOT LOOKING FOR A NEW RETAINER. I'M DOING THIS STRICTLY ON MY OWN.

WHY SHOULD YOU CARE? HE WASN'T YOUR FATHER! I DON'T THINK HE ENDEARED HIMSELF TO YOU.
HE WAS MY CLIENT. I WAS SUPPOSED TO TAKE CARE OF HIM AND I COULDN'T
I GUESS I'VE LOST TOO MANY PEOPLE IN MY LIFE TO TAKE THAT LIGHTLY.

WE STARED AT EACH OTHER, SUNLIGHT AND SHADOW LIT, AND TIME WAS MIRACULOUSLY ALIVE AGAIN, BUT SUSPENDED LIKE A PULSE CAUGHT BETWEEN HEARTBEATS.

WITH SUDDEN, FRIGHTENING FORCE, I WANTED TO TOUCH HER SOFT LINE OF THROAT, TRACE MY FINGERTIPS UP TO HER STRONG CHIN, FEEL EACH SOFT BUMP AND EXQUISITE LINE ON HER LIPS

THERE WERE TOO MANY POSSIBLE RAMIFICATIONS IN THAT SIMPLE ACT, A REACH FROM HERE TO THERE, OF NO MORE THAN INCHES, COULD HAVE DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES
WOULD SHE RESPOND?
SHE'S A MARRIED WOMAN, FOR GOD'S SAKE! WHOSE FATHER'S DEAD ONLY A MATTER OF HOURS WHAT IN HELL CAN YOU BE THINKING OF?
OH, PLEASE, JOYCE, HELP ME!
BUT JOYCE WAS GONE SO LONG, AND IN THE END, WE CAN ONLY HELP OURSELVES.
THE HEART FINALLY BEAT; THE PULSE MOVED, AND I SPOKE, RATHER THAN REACHING OUT, AND I SAID THE TRUTH, BUT IT WASN'T THE ONLY TRUTH
PUT IT THIS WAY, YOUR FATHER WAS MY JOB, AND I DO MY JOB THE BEST I CAN
AND I DON'T LIKE IT WHEN PEOPLE MAKE IT LOOK LIKE I'M NOT VERY GOOD AT IT.
HELLO, DARLING HEARD YOU DRIVE UP NICE TO SEE YOU AGAIN, MR DUSK
VALENTINE COOPER LOOKED FRESH AND EAGER, AS IF DEATH WERE ONLY A VAGUE RUMOR HE HAD HEARD WHISPERED ABOUT BUT NEVER REALLY BELIEVED. HE SENSED SOMETHING WAS WRONG AND THE EAGERNESS DISSIPATED, REPLACED WITH CONCERN.
IS SOMETHING WRONG, HON? YOU LOOK SO ODD
I STOOD BACK, FEELING INTRUSIVE AND ASHAMED I TOLD MYSELF IT WAS AMANDA'S GRIEF WHICH HAD BROUGHT SUCH A POWERFUL RESPONSE IN ME
IT COULD HAVE BEEN ANOTHER TRUTH, BUT I STILL FELT LIKE I OWED VALENTINE AN APOLOGY
SOMEONE SHOT.
MY FATHER
ARE YOU JOKING?
NO, NO, OF COURSE NOT'
OH, MY GOOD LORD!
YOU POOR DARLING!

WHAT'S THIS THING?
HIS LEGACY
HE LEFT AT LEAST ONE OTHER THING.
FLIP
WHAT IS THAT?
A SILVER BULLET SPECIFICALLY, THE ONE THAT WAS FIRED AT YOUR FATHER ..THE ONE THAT MISSED.
I COULDN'T SWEAR TO THIS IN A COURT OF LAW, OKAY? I COULD BE WRONG.
FLIP
BUT THE MAN WHO TRIED TO KILL YOUR FATHER THAT SECOND TIME, HE WAS IN SOME TYPE OF WORK UNIFORM.
FLIP
NOW, IT WAS STORMY THAT NIGHT... WIND, RAIN, ALL OF THAT .. BUT IT COULD HAVE BEEN THE SAME UNIFORM YOUR WORKERS WEAR AT MALONE RIBBONS, VALENTINE
SQUISH
MIGHT BE INFORMATIVE TO FIND OUT IF ANY OF YOUR EMPLOYEES HAVE A LICENSE FOR A .32 CALIBER PISTOL.

TUESDAY--
JULY 3, 1934

ITALIAN HARLEM WAS DOWNTOWN FROM THE MALONE MANOR, A FIVE-MINUTE TRIP BY TRAIN, PROBABLY NOT EVEN A MILE AWAY IN DISTANCE.

BUT THE TENEMENT FLATS BELONGED TO A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAY OF LIFE.

THE GULINO HOUSEHOLD WAS A FOUR-ROOM WORLD WHERE A MIXTURE OF COOKING ODORS COMPETED WITH EACH OTHER--

--FRESH PORK SAUSAGE BATTLING WITH BRACIÓLE COOKED WITH OREGANO.
JENNIE GULINO HAD HER RADIO-LISTENING PLANS DOWN TO A SCIENCE. IT WAS LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE AT 5:45 AND A QUICK CHANGE OF STATIONS TO UNCLE DON AT 6:00.

BUT HER BROTHER, TONY, DID NOT JOIN US AROUND THE RADIO. HE WAS CREATING HIS OWN STORIES, IN INTENSE WHISPERS OF OUTRAGE AND LOUD EXPLOSIONS OF VIOLENCE.
I WATCHED TONY WITH THOSE TOY SOLDIERS.

AFTER A WHILE, I REALIZED HE WAS PRETENDING THOSE LITTLE IRON FIGURES WERE SOMETHING OTHER THAN SOLDIERS. MY ARMS AND SHOULDERS WERE STIFF, THEY GAVE ME A TWINGE OF PAIN WHEN I MOVED THEM. I HAD TO CONVINCE MYSELF TO GET OFF THE CHAIR

SPIDER LEGS RACED UP MY SPINE I LEANED IN THE DOORWAY, LISTENING TO LITTLE BOY HATE, AND I FELT OLD AND DISPLACED
YAH-DA! YAH-DA!
PUMP SOME LEAD INTA HIM!
AWW
HAH! GOT HIM!
RIGHT IN THE OLD BREAD-BASKET!
THAT'LL LEARN HIM!
HE WAS SEEING IMAGINARY BLOOD.
TONY?
THAT SUPPOSED TO BE ME?
WHAT'S IT TO YA?
IT AIN'T NONE OF YOUR BEE'S WAX!
THERE ARE MOMENTS OF CHILLING REALIZATION, WHERE YOU WONDER HOW YOU DID NOT KNOW WHAT WAS REALLY GOING ON AROUND YOU AND SUSPECT, THOUGH YOU WOULD COERCIVELY DENOUNCE SUCH AN IDEA, THAT YOU MUST HAVE KNOWN.
I WONDERED WHAT I WAS DOING HERE
BEING A SUBSTITUTE FATHER?
TRYING TO CLING TO JOYCE THROUGH HER CHILDREN?
MAKING THEM THE SONS AND DAUGHTERS JOYCE AND I WOULD NEVER HAVE?

YOUR MAKING OFF I'M GETTING KILLED IS NONE OF MY BUSINESS?

I NOT ONLY FELT OLD, I FELT SOMETHING DYING, AND I WAS SCARED, NOT THE WAY I HAD BEEN ON THAT BUS-TOP, THAT WAS INSTINCTUAL.

THIS WAS A VISCERAL, SUBTLER FEAR, THE KIND YOU EXPERIENCE WHEN YOUR VIEW OF LIFE BLURS, AND YOU ARE LEFT STRANDED, NO LONGER SURE OF ANYTHING YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW.

YOU AIN'T MY OLD MAN' YOU AIN'T GOT NO RIGHT TO GAY NOTHING TO ME!

FIRST OFF, YOU CAN *RESPECT* YOUR ELDERS!

WHYN'T YOU MAKE ME!

THE ANGER RUSHED UP IN ME ALL AT ONCE, LIKE A VIOLENT FEVER, WITH BLOOD POUNDING AT MY TEMPLES, MY ARM RAISED, OPEN-HANDED--

--READY TO STRIKE!

MY ANGER SCREAMED, "DO IT."
THE LITTLE BUGGER NEEDED A WHIPPING.
I HAD THE FEELING THAT WAS WHAT HE WANTED ME TO DO.
SOMEHOW, THAT IMPRESSION REMINDED ME OF LIZZIE'S KIDNAPPER, HIS BROKEN NOSE SMEARED WITH BLOOD.
THE IMAGE FRIGHTENED ME
IT MADE ME LOWER MY HAND--
--EVEN THOUGH THE CHILD INSIDE THE ADULT STILL SHOUTED AT ME TO BE THE AUTHORITARIAN
WHAT MAKES YOU THINK I WANT TO MAKE YOU CRY, TONY?
THAT'S WHAT I'D LIKE TO KNOW.
WHYN'T YOU DO IT? GO AHEAD! YOU AIN'T NEVER GONNA MAKE ME CRY!

IT WAS ABOUT 6:30 BY THE TIME I GOT BACK TO MY OFFICE. THERE WAS A HOT WIND STIRRING UP DUST AND TRASH. IN MY HEAD I PUNISHED TONY FOR DRIVING ME AWAY FROM THE ONLY PLACE THAT SEEMED LIKE FAMILY
FREDDIE BUCKENHACKER SNAPPED HIS SHOESHINE RAG AT ME LIKE A WHIP
HE SEEMED GLAD TO SEE ME.
I WAS GLAD SOMEBODY WAS.
FORGET IT, FREDDIE! I'M NOT GOING TO PLACE A BET ON WHETHER SOME COCKAMAMIE GUYS WHO WEAR TOPLESS BATHING SUITS AT CONEY ISLAND TOMORROW WILL END UP IN THE SLAMMER OR NOT.
IT'S NOT MY KIND OF BET!
NAH!
I'M NOT CALLING YOU ABOUT THAT
I LOCATED THAT DAME YOU BEEN LOOKING FOR THE FLAPPER WHO USED TO STEP OUT WITH YOUR CLIENT.
RITA ANDERSON?
WHAT OTHER DAME WOULD I BE TALKING ABOUT? YOU DIDN'T ASK ME TO FIND CLAUDETTE COLBERT, DID YOU?
WHERE IS SHE?
SMALL HOTEL OFF BOWERY SHE HAS A JOB WAITRESSING, BUT SHE GETS OFF AT SIX, SO YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO CATCH HER SOAKING HER TOOTSIES
I OWE YOU, FREDDIE
JUST TAKE ME ON A CASE WITH YOU SOMETIME
YOU WOULDN'T LIKE IT
IT'D BORE YOU TO DEATH

RITA ANDERSON'S EYES HAD ONCE BEEN DARK WITH THE DESIRE TO BREAK FREE--
--WITH THE NEED TO SHOCK
SHE HAD TURNED HER BACK ON THE VALUES HER PARENTS HELD DEAR
POOR CRANSTON.
BA
AHHH!
POOR ALL OF US, TRYIN' TO MAKE A BUCK, TRYIN' TO STAY ALIVE.
BUT SHE HAD LATE DISCOVERED THAT WHAT SHE HAD THOUGHT WAS FREEDOM WAS ONLY AN ENTRANCE-WAY INTO ANOTHER CASE--
--AS DARK AND BLEAK AND COVERED WITH BIRD DROPPINGS AS THE ONE SHE HAD ESCAPED FROM
SHE SMOKED OLD GOLDS, THE THROAT-EASE CIGARETTES, AS IF HER LIFE DEPENDED ON EACH DRAG
I'D HAVE STAYED WITH CRANSTON, YOU KNOW
I WASN'T LIKE THAT BLUE-BLOOD BITCH OF A WIFE HE HAD
I'M NO RAT DESERTING A SINKING SHIP NOT ME.
BUT CRANSTON WOULDN'T HAVE IT.

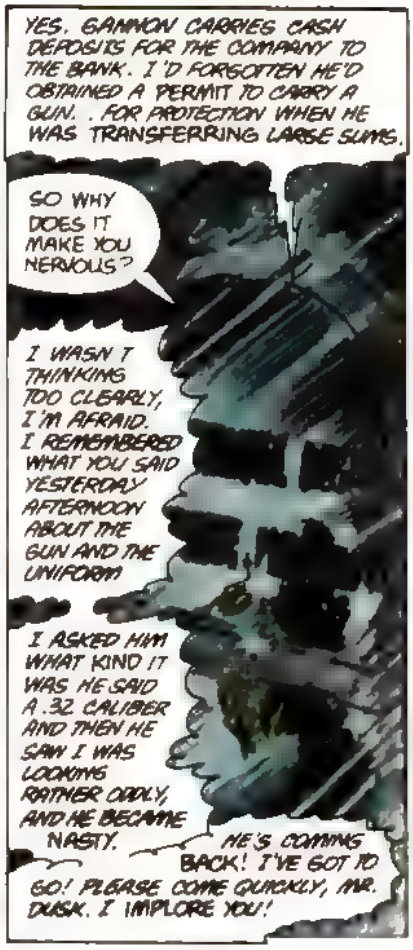
OH, HE STILL CAME TO SEE ME MOSTLY WHEN HE WANTED SOME
AND DON'T YOU ACT SHOCKED. YOU KNOW HOW MEN ARE, THEY CAN HAVE GOOD INTENTIONS, BUT THEIR STINGERS WILL DO THEM IN EVERY TIME
DID HE EVER MENTION ANYTHING TO YOU ABOUT ANY KIND OF BIG DEAL THAT MIGHT GET HIM OUT FROM UNDER?
HE HINTED ALL KINDS OF THINGS DROVE ME BUGGY SOMETIMES. I KNOW HE HAD SOME KIND OF STORAGE BOX. HE HAD ONE OF THEM CLAIM CHECKS FOR IT
SAID HE HAD TO PUT THAT CLAIM CHECK IN A REAL SAFE PLACE
WHERE?
HE NEVER DID SAY. DAY I SAW IT MUST HAVE BEEN NEAR THE START OF JUNE... IT WAS SOME SORT OF LEATHER THING WITH A NUMBER ON IT
THAT'S ABOUT THE SAME TIME HE BORROWED AMANDA'S CAMERA
NOW WHAT THE HELL WENT ON THAT FIRST WEEK OF JUNE?
AND WHERE WOULD HE HIDE THAT CLAIM CHECK?
I NEVER SAW IT
BEATS ME, MR--PEOPLE ARE MYSTERIES TO ME. EVEN WHEN YOU BEEN TO BED WITH THEM, THEY'RE STILL A GODDAMN MYSTERY
SHE DREW A DRAG ON HER CIGARETTE, INHALING THE SMOKE LIKE A VAMPIRE SUCKING FOR BLOOD.
SOMETIMES, BELIEVE IT OR NOT, I FIND MYSELF A MYSTERY I DON'T EVEN UNDERSTAND WHY I DID WHAT I DID
YOU EVER FEEL LIKE THAT ABOUT YOURSELF?
I TRY NOT TO
I HATE MYSTERIES

I HATE WALKING INTO AN EMPTY ROOM WHERE A PHONE HAS BEEN RINGING. I'VE NEVER ANSWERED ONE OF THOSE DAMN CALLS YET WHERE IT WAS GOOD NEWS ON THE WING.
RINNG
RIINNG
THE PHONE KEPT ITS RECORD INTACT

I JUST WANTED TO SLEEP. I DIDN'T WANT TO DO ANYTHING. I DIDN'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT THAT MOMENT IN THE GARAGE WITH AMANDA OR OF MY HAND RAISED ABOVE TONY'S FACE OR ABOUT MISSING CLAIM CHECKS
HELLO?
MR DUSK?-- THIS IS VALENTINE COOPER. CAN YOU HEAR ME? I DAREN'T SPEAK TOO LOUD.
WHY NOT?
GANNON MCALISTER IS IN THE NEXT ROOM. YOU REMEMBER HIM? OUR FOREMAN AT MALONE RIBBONS?

YES, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?
WELL, WE'RE ALL ALONE HERE. AMANDA AND HER MOTHER HAVE GONE TO A BROADWAY SHOW.
GANNON AND I HAVE BEEN GOING OVER THE BOOKS. IT WASN'T UNTIL A FEW MOMENTS AGO THAT I SPOTTED THE GUN.

GUN?


YES. GANNON CARRIES CASH DEPOSITS FOR THE COMPANY TO THE BANK. I'D FORGOTTEN HE'D OBTAINED A PERMIT TO CARRY A GUN. . FOR PROTECTION WHEN HE WAS TRANSFERRING LARGE SUMS.
SO WHY DOES IT MAKE YOU NERVOUS?
I WASN'T THINKING TOO CLEARLY, I'M AFRAID. I REMEMBERED WHAT YOU SAID YESTERDAY AFTERNOON ABOUT THE GUN AND THE UNIFORM
I ASKED HIM WHAT KIND IT WAS. HE SAID A .32 CALIBER AND THEN HE SAW I WAS LOOKING RATHER ODDLY, AND HE BECAME NASTY.
HE'S COMING BACK! I'VE GOT TO GO! PLEASE COME QUICKLY, MR. DUSK. I IMPLORE YOU!

SHADOWS BLENDING
LONELY-SOUNDING RAIN SWEPT SLASHING ACROSS WINDSHIELD ON 60-MILES-PER-HOUR WIND
NIGHTTIME THOUGHTS FLUTTERING, A LINKAGE TO THE PAST THESE SHADOWS AND RAIN DROPPED PAST THE MOUTHS OF DARK-SOME CAVE SHELTERS IN MANKIND'S FIRST HUDDLINGS, AND WE HAVE YET TO ESCAPE THEM
CAR LIGHTS ONLY EMPHASIZE THEIR PRESENCE
THERE IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MOST CHILDREN AND ADULTS WHEN THEY ARE OVERTIRED.
CHILDREN TEND TO LAUGH, ANYTHING CAN BE UPROARIOUSLY FUNNY, AND JUST AS ABRUPTLY THE LAUGHTER CAN TURN TO TEARS, AS IF ALL THE EMOTIONAL EXTREMES MUST BE RELEASED BEFORE SLEEP
ADULTS, ON THE OTHER HAND, OFTEN EXPERIENCE A QUIET GIDDINESS THAT TURNS TO FUTILITY, AN UNEASY TIME THAT ASKS WHERE THEY HAVE BEEN TRAVELING AND WHERE THEY ARE GOING TO ARRIVE.
PUT UP THE GUN, GANNON, DAMN YOU! YOU'RE ACTING LIKE A MANIAC!
I SAW THE TWO FIGURES STRUGGLING AND I FORGOT HOW TIRED I WAS I WAS WIDE AWAKE AND TENSE

VALENTINE, RIGHT? AND WHAT'S HIS NAME? MCALISTER!
LOCKED!
I HAD TO REACH THEM, BUT I HAD NO IDEA HOW!
GET INTO THE HOUSE
QUICK!
THE TRELLIS
CLIMB THE TRELLIS
SKAOW!
...Y RIPPED OFF IN MY HANDS. JUST HOPE THE TRELLIS DOESN'T YANK AWAY FROM THE WALL!
PRAY THE CARPENTER WHO PUT IT THERE TOOK PRIDE IN HIS WORK AND ATTACHED IT FOR PERMANENCE
A GUNSHOT EXPLODED, LOUDER THAN THE THUNDER--
--AND A SECTION OF SKY WENT THE COLOR OF BRIGHT FLAME FOR TWO SECONDS!
AND THEN BACK TO DARKNESS.

OH, GODDAMN IT TO HELL!
NO!
NO, AMANDA. I REALLY TRIED TO GET TO HIM IN TIME. I SWEAR!
A BODY HURTLED OUT INTO THE AIR, DOUBLED OVER--
--ALMOST BONELESSLY CURLING IN MIDAIR, ARMS SWINGING USELESSLY--
SKRAASSH
--WITH NO ATTEMPT TO BREAK THE FALL.
A WET THUD IN RAINY GRASS AND EARTH.
SPLUT
AND THEN, EVERYTHING STILL AND DARK IN THE AFTERMATH OF THUNDER, LIGHTNING, AND SEVERAL IRREVERSIBLE SECONDS OF VIOLENCE.
VALENTINE!
UP HERE!
MY GOD!
THAT WAS ALMOST ME...
DOWN THERE!

WEDNESDAY... JULY 4, 1934
MIDNIGHT.
THERE IS A CALM MUNDANENESS AS DETECTIVES AND MEDICAL EXAMINERS AND POLICE PHOTOGRAPHERS PROWL ABOUT THE SCENE OF A MURDER THAT SEEMS TO REJECT THE VIOLENT ACT THAT TURNED IT INTO SUCH A PLACE
WHILE VALENTINE WAS INTERROGATED BY A DETECTIVE PEVAK, A LIMOUSINE PULLED UP, DISCHARGING AMANDA, HER MOTHER, AUGUSTA, AND UNCLE JOHN MALONE. THEY LOOKED CONFUSED. WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE TRAIPSING ABOUT OUR GROUNDS? I WOULDN'T HAVE PUT IT PAST JOHN MALONE TO COMMAND EVERYONE TO GET THE HELL OUT!
SO THAT'S HOW IT HAPPENED. AFTER I HUNG UP WITH MR. DUSK, GANNON CAME INTO THE ROOM.
HE WAS VERY AGITATED HE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT I WAS INSINUATING WHEN I'D ASKED ABOUT HIS GUN. WAS I ACCUSING HIM OF ANYTHING?
I TRIED TO MOLLIFY HIM, SAID I WASN'T IMPLYING ANYTHING, THAT BOTH MY UNCLE AND I VALUED HIM AS AN EMPLOYEE.

AND THEN HE PULLED THE GUN BEGAN RANTING. DIDN'T CATCH IT ALL. SOME CRAZY STORY ABOUT HOW CRANSTON HAD TOLD HIM HE WAS GOING TO GET HIM FIRED FROM HIS JOB, AND THAT'S WHAT STARTED IT ALL.
MOST I COULD MAKE OUT OF IT WAS HE THOUGHT CRANSTON HATED HIM BECAUSE IT WAS CRANSTON WHO HIRED HIM AS FOREMAN AND NOW HERE HE WAS STILL WORKING FOR THE FAMILY WHILE CRANSTON WAS OUT ON THE DOLE.
HE SAID HE WASN'T GOING TO LET CRANSTON, ME, OR ANYONE ELSE PUT HIS FAMILY IN BREADLINES
WHAT YOU GOT, MR?
THE EJECTED SHELL THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE IT FOR YOUR SOUVENIR COLLECTION
WHAT'S HAPPENED?
AMANDA IT'S GANNON MCALISTER HE TRIED TO IT STILL SEEMS QUITE UNREAL TRIED TO KILL ME, HARDLY MORE THAN AN HOUR AGO
APPARENTLY, HE WAS THE ONE BEHIND THE ATTEMPTS ON YOUR FATHER'S LIFE
SKRASH
DETECTIVE PEVAK, I WANT THIS MAN OUT OF HERE, IMMEDIATELY.
HE IS NOT WELCOME ON THESE GROUNDS! DO YOUR DUTY, PEVAK!

AND THE NEXT TIME YOU TRESPASS, YOUNG MAN, I'LL HAVE YOU THROWN IN JAIL!
I THINK YOU HAVE SOME LINT ON YOUR TUX
I'D CHANGE CLEANERS IF I WERE YOU, I HATE TO SEE YOU GO OUT NOT LOOKING YOUR BEST
GET HIM OUT OF HERE!
NOW!
YOU TOSS HIM OUT, YOU TOSS ME OUT! YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND ME, UNCLE!
YOU KNOW ME WELL ENOUGH TO KNOW I DON'T MAKE IDLE THREATS!
I'M SURE YOU COULD CARE LESS IF I LEFT OR NOT, BUT I'M SURE MOTHER DOESN'T WANT ME TO GO. RIGHT, MOTHER?
YOU RE DISTRAUGHT, CHILD!
WE DO NOT DISCUSS PERSONAL AFFAIRS IN FRONT OF STRANGERS
LEAVE AMANDA ALONE, THIS IS NO TIME FOR YOUR MARTINET ACT!
AUGUSTA'S EYES REMINDED ME OF MEN I'D SEEN WHO WERE SHELL SHOCKED, EYES GLAZED YET PANICKY, LETTING YOU LOOK IN ON THE SEESAW, TOTTERING EDGE OF SANITY. THE EYES SAID, "NO MORE!" IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS
STOP IT! STOP IT!
AMANDA, I'LL TAKE HER TO HER BED YOU TAKE CARE OF MR DUSK.

2:35 a.m.

THE RAIN SPLATTERED ON THE TALL WINDOWS, LIGHTNING WHITEWASHED THE HANDSOME ROOMS. THE HIGH CEILINGS MADE THE PLACE SEEM LIKE A MAUSOLEUM NOW THAT ALL THE OUTSIDERS EXCEPT ME HAD DEPARTED.

AMANDA SERVED ME COFFEE FROM A STERLING SILVER SERVING SET, BUT I SAW ONLY THE WAY SHE MOVED, THE THRUST OF THIGH, THE TIGHTENING OF CALF, THE FLASH OF INTELLIGENCE IN HER BLUE-GRAY EYES, THE CURVE OF HER STRONG FINGERS ABOUT A SAUCER HANDLE

SO ALL IN ALL, IT'S BEEN A *BUSY* DAY RITA ANDERSON SWEARS SHE SAW THE CLAIM CHECK. BUT IF IT *EXISTS*, WHERE COULD IT BE?

IT CERTAINLY WASN'T IN HIS *ROOM* I SPENT THE DAY GOING THROUGH IT

SKRAAASSH

YEH AND IT WASN'T ON HIS *PERSON* SO WHERE...

WAIT A MINUTE!

WAIT JUST *ONE* MINUTE! SOMETHING CRANSTON SAID TO ME, THAT FIRST DAY, ABOUT THE *LUCKY* APPLE!

YOU REMEMBER?

YES HE SAID PEOPLE PASSING BY WOULD *NOTICE* IT

YEH! HE SAID THAT! BUT HE ALSO SAID IT WAS HIS *KEY* OUT OF WHERE HE WAS. IT REMINDED HIM HE WASN'T GOING TO BE ON THE *SIDE-WALK* MUCH LONGER!

IT'S THE GODDAMN APPLE!

I'LL BET ON IT!

WHAT'S GOING ON?
I'M NOT SURE, BUT I THINK NATHAN HAS DISCOVERED SOME CLUE OR OTHER
THUD
WHOOSH
GRUUSP
WE'LL FIND OUT WHY
AND I'LL TELL YOU THIS, I DOUBT THAT GANNON MCALISTER WOULD HAVE THE KIND OF CONTACTS IT WOULD TAKE TO PUT PROFESSIONAL GUNMEN AFTER YOUR FATHER
THAT TAKES PEOPLE WITH MONEY AND CONNECTIONS MOB CONNECTIONS!
GANNON MIGHT HAVE TRIED TO KILL YOUR FATHER ON THE 19TH--
--BUT I DON'T THINK HE COULD SWING A DEAL LIKE THAT
SURE ENOUGH THIS IS A CLAIM CHECK FOR A LOCKER AT GRAND CENTRAL STATION
BUT WHAT DOES IT MATTER NOW, NATHAN?
HE'LL STILL BE DEAD AND THE MAN WHO DID IT, WE CAN'T PUNISH HIM FURTHER!

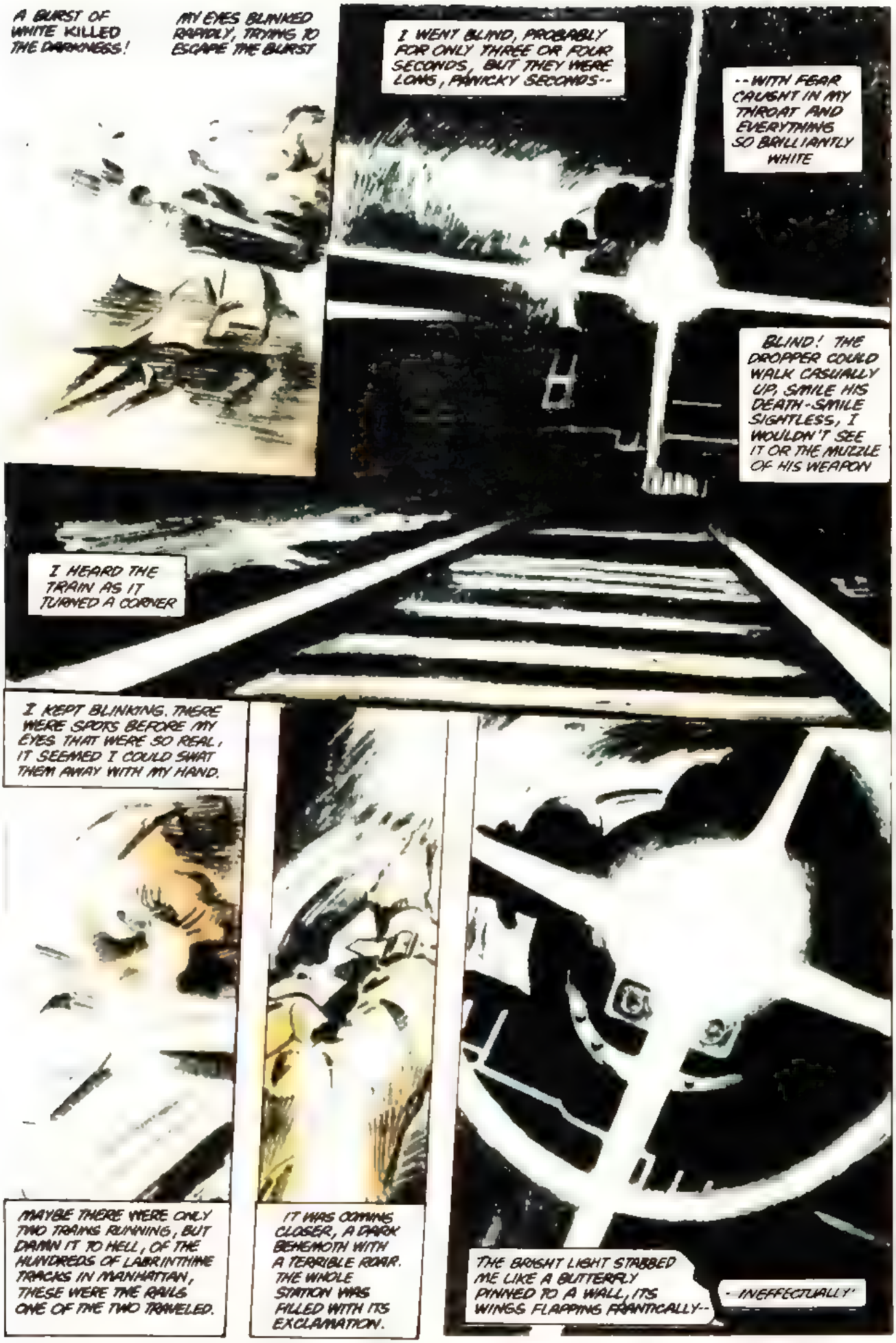
4:57 a.m.
DURING MY CHILDHOOD, GRAND CENTRAL WAS STILL A DEPOT FOR STEAM TRAINS.
WHEN THE TRAINS CAME INTO THE STATION IT WAS SO DEAFENING IT LEFT YOUR EARS RINGING. PLUMES OF EBON SMOKE LIFTED TO WALLS THAT WERE SOOT-BLACKENED BY DECADES OF ARRIVALS AND DEPARTURES. A VISIT TO THE STATION LEFT YOUR CLOTHES GRAY
THE TRAIN YARD TO THE NORTH OF THE DEPOT HAD TURNED 23 BLOCKS OF PRIME MANHATTAN REAL ESTATE INTO A WASTELAND
KLIK KLIK
I SAW CORNELIUS "COMMODORE" VANDERBILT'S CAST-IRON AND GLASS TERMINAL COME DOWN
IT SEEMED TO TAKE FOREVER FOR THE NEW SPLIT-LEVEL LIMESTONE STRUCTURE TO BE FINISHED, BUT THEN, YOUNG BOYS OFTEN HAVE A DISTORTED SENSE OF TIME
AND PARCE
BY THE TIME THE TERMINAL WAS FINISHED, SO WERE THE STEAM TRAINS NEW YORK CENTRAL HAD ELECTRIFIED ITS LINES IN 1902.
TOP OF THE MORNING, DICK!

THE 75-FOOT-HIGH MAIN CONCOURSE WINDOWS HAD ALWAYS IMPRESSED ME, BUT I HARDLY SAW THEM NOW
I SAW THE WILD LIGHT IN THE DROPPER'S EYES. A LIGHT THAT LOOKED IN ON TERRIBLE, INHUMANE DEEDS AND REVELED IN THEM
IT WAS LIKE LOOKING INTO A SPOTLIGHT THAT REVEALED PLEASURE IN GRUESOME, LINGERING DEATHS. THERE WAS A LOOK OF PSYCHOSEXUAL ANTICIPATION ON HIS PITTED FACE
IF HE COULD, THIS MAN WOULD STAND IN THE MORGUE, WAITING FOR APPLAUSE FOR HIS HANDI-WORK. THERE ARE SOME PEOPLE WHO HAVE NO COMPASSION, TO WHOM KILLING IS A MEANINGLESS ACT
THE REST OF US HAVE LITTLE DEFENSE AGAINST THEM
WE KNOW WE HAVE SECRET, GHASTLY SINISTER URGINGS IN THE SHADOWY CREVICES OF OUR BRAINS, BUT WE DO NOT ADMIT IT OUT LOUD, AND SELDOM TO OURSELVES.
HAND IT OVER, AND THANKS--
-- FOR FINDING IT FOR US
I WAS AFRAID OF DEATH, REAL-AND-IMMEDIATE DEATH, DEATH SO CLOSE I COULD FEEL ITS BREATH ON MY FACE
DO IT NOW
I DIDN'T COME HERE TO DIDDLE

THIS ALL YOU CAME FOR ?
YEAH AND MAYBE TO PUT ABOUT TWENTY/ THIRTY SLUGS IN YOUR GULLET!
GIVE IT HERE!
I DON'T MUCH CARE FOR THAT, AS DISGUSTING AS THE THOUGHT IS --
-- I ALMOST PREFERRED YOU CAME HERE TO DIDDLE.
HEH! HEH! HEH!
THEY SAID YOU WAS A SMART-MOUTH.
'COURSE IT'S HARD TO GAB WHEN YOU GOT A WAD OF LEAD STUCK IN YOUR THROAT
SKASH
KATA-KATA-KA
CHA-DAH-DAH-DAH! DAH! LIKE MY IMITATION OF A CHOPPER, DICK ?
I THREW THE ENVELOPE BACK-HANDED, SNAPPING MY WRIST TO GIVE IT VELOCITY.
FWIP
IT FELT AWFULLY LIGHTWEIGHT TO BE THE CAUSE OF HOPE AND DEATH. IT WASN'T A LIKELY WEAPON, EITHER, BUT THE EDGE CAUGHT HIS EYE AND I WAS FOLLOWING IT.
THE MACHINE GUN STUTTER WAS MAGNIFIED A THOUSANDFOLD OFF THE EXQUISITELY DETAILED VAULTED CEILINGS, A LETHAL ROAR THAT SEEMED WOULD ECHO INTO ETERNITY--
--OR AT LEAST UNTIL ONE OF THE BULLETS WOULD INVADE MY FLESH, KICKING ME BACKWARDS, SIDE-WARDS, WHICHEVER-WAY-WARDS TO LEAVE ME BROKEN AND DISCARDED, SOILING THE POLISHED FLOORS

I MANAGED TO GET MY HANDS BACK ON CRANSTON'S MANILA-HORDE BEFORE THE DROPPER HAD TIME TO GAIN HIS BALANCE. HE DIDN'T BOTHER TRYING TO AIM THE CHOPPER, HE JUST FIRED IN A WIDE, INDISCRIMINATORY SWEEP, FIGURING HE'D HIT SOMETHING LIVING ALONG THE WAY
KATA-KATA-KA
I DIDN'T TRY TO STAND OR RUN, MY SPINAL COLUMN WOULD HAVE HAD MORE HOLES IN IT THAN A TERMITE-INFESTED TOOTHPICK
WING
WHING
I SPRAWLED DOWN THE STAIRS, MANAGING TO HIT EVERY ONE, I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH BOUNCE
I THOUGHT I HEARD HIM GIGGLING AND THAT REALLY SCARED THE HELL OUT OF ME!
WHUCKK
TRACK 4
GET AWAY FROM HERE!
WHERE?
ANY DAMN WHERE!
THE CLOSEST EXIT WAS THE DOWN-RAMP TO THE COMMUTER TRAINS. I DIDN'T HAVE MUCH CHOICE, SO I TOOK IT, HOBBLING AND LURCHING, TRYING TO FAVOR THE KNEE I'D BANGED ON ONE OF THE STAIRS.
MY ONLY CONSOLATION WAS, MY SHOULDERS AND ARMPITS DIDN'T HURT SO MUCH ANYMORE, OR PERHAPS IT WAS JUST THE NEWER PAIN SCREAMING LOUDER.

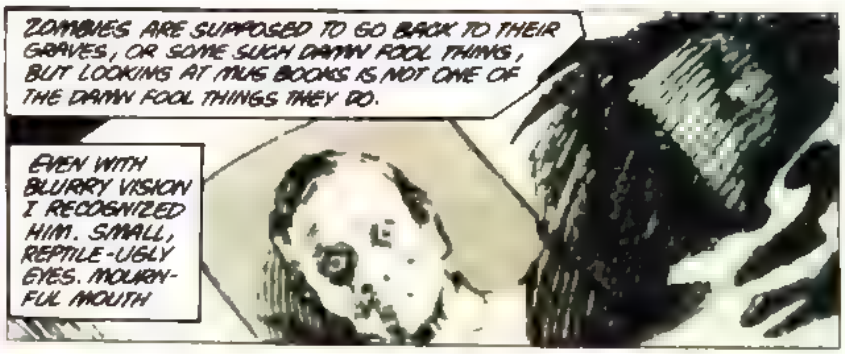
HE WAS A NIGHTMARISH GARGOYLE, 30'S STYLE IN THE SWIRLING SHADOWS HE LOOKED LIKE ANIMATED STONE.
RA-TA-TA-TA-TA
THE SUNKEN TRACKS OFFERED THE ONLY COVER
OH, CHRIST! GET YOUR HANDS OUT IN FRONT OF YOUR FACE. PROBABLY BREAK MY FINGERS TO BONE SPLINTERS!
BETTER THAN A CHIP OF BONE SLICING INTO BRAIN TISSUE
CHA
CHA
CHA
CHA
KA-CHOW!
CHEW
CHEW
CHEW
CHEW
WHIP
JUST RETURN SOME FIRE.
STAY LOW
HOLD HIM OFF UNTIL THE CLAIMS ROOM CLERK OR SOMEBODY CALLS THE POLICE.
THAT SHOULD BE EASY ENOUGH IF A DAMN TRAIN DOESN'T ARRIVE.
RELAX, IT'S 5 A.M.
THE ODDS, FOR ONCE, ARE ON YOUR SIDE THERE'RE PROBABLY NOT TWO TRAINS RUNNING IN THE WHOLE SLEEPING CITY.


A BURST OF WHITE KILLED THE DARKNESS!
MY EYES BLINKED RAPIDLY, TRYING TO ESCAPE THE BURST
I WENT BLIND, PROBABLY FOR ONLY THREE OR FOUR SECONDS, BUT THEY WERE LONG, PANICKY SECONDS--
--WITH FEAR CAUGHT IN MY THROAT AND EVERYTHING SO BRILLIANTLY WHITE
BLIND! THE DROPPER COULD WALK CASUALLY UP, SMILE HIS DEATH-SMILE SIGHTLESS, I WOULDN'T SEE IT OR THE MUZZLE OF HIS WEAPON
I HEARD THE TRAIN AS IT TURNED A CORNER
I KEPT BLINKING. THERE WERE SPOTS BEFORE MY EYES THAT WERE SO REAL, IT SEEMED I COULD SWAT THEM AWAY WITH MY HAND.
MAYBE THERE WERE ONLY TWO TRAINS RUNNING, BUT DAMN IT TO HELL, OF THE HUNDREDS OF LABRINTHINE TRACKS IN MANHATTAN, THESE WERE THE RAILS ONE OF THE TWO TRAVELED.
IT WAS COMING CLOSER, A DARK BEHEMOTH WITH A TERRIBLE ROAR. THE WHOLE STATION WAS FILLED WITH ITS EXCLAMATION.
THE BRIGHT LIGHT STABBED ME LIKE A BUTTERFLY PINNED TO A WALL, ITS WINGS FLAPPING FRANTICALLY--
- INEFFECTUALLY'

GET OUT OF THERE! THE WORDS SCREAMED IN MY HEAD, AN URGENT ECHO MAGNIFYING RATHER THAN DIMINISHING.
I TRIED FOR THE PLATFORM EDGE
HE WAS WAITING FOR ME. NO SMILE NOW. NO TIME FOR PLEASURE.
CHA-DA-DA-DA
TIME TO GET IT OVER WITH.
CHUD
CHUD
CHUD
BULLETS CHIPPED THE PLATFORM EDGE. CONCRETE CONFETTI WHIZZED PAST ME.
THE LIGHT WAS EVERYWHERE NOW. IT REVEALED EVERY SECRET RECESS.
CHA-DA-DA-DA
GUN BLAZE.
BEHEMOTH'S GLARE.
METAL WHEELS GRINDING OVER METAL TRACKS!
ONE CHANCE!
ONE DAMN CHANCE!
THE HARDEST THING TO DO WAS WAIT UNTIL THE TRAIN WAS ALMOST UPON ME--
- BEFORE I LEAPT FOR THE OPPOSITE PLATFORM
THE TRAIN CREATED A BARRIER BETWEEN ME AND THE DROPPER, AND IN THE PROCESS BROUGHT SALVATION RATHER THAN DESTRUCTION.

BAD WAY TO START A NEW DAY.
OR END A LONG NIGHT.
5:24 a.m.
I DIDN'T TELL LT. MURRAY ABRAHAMS ABOUT THE PACKAGE I DIDN'T RETRIEVE IT.
IT WOULD BE SAFE THERE FOR A WHILE. NO ONE PICKS THE GARBAGE OFF THE TRACKS FOR MONTHS AT A TIME.
YOU LOOK LIKE A ZOMBIE THE MORNING AFTER MARDI GRAS.
I FEEL LIKE A ZOMBIE THE MORNING AFTER MARDI GRAS.

6:23 a.m.
I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT I'D FIND IN THAT PACKAGE. I HAD SOME THEORIES, SURE. I WANTED TO SEE WHAT WAS IN THERE SO I COULD ADVISE AMANDA BEFORE I MADE WHATEVER WAS SECRETED IN THERE PUBLIC.

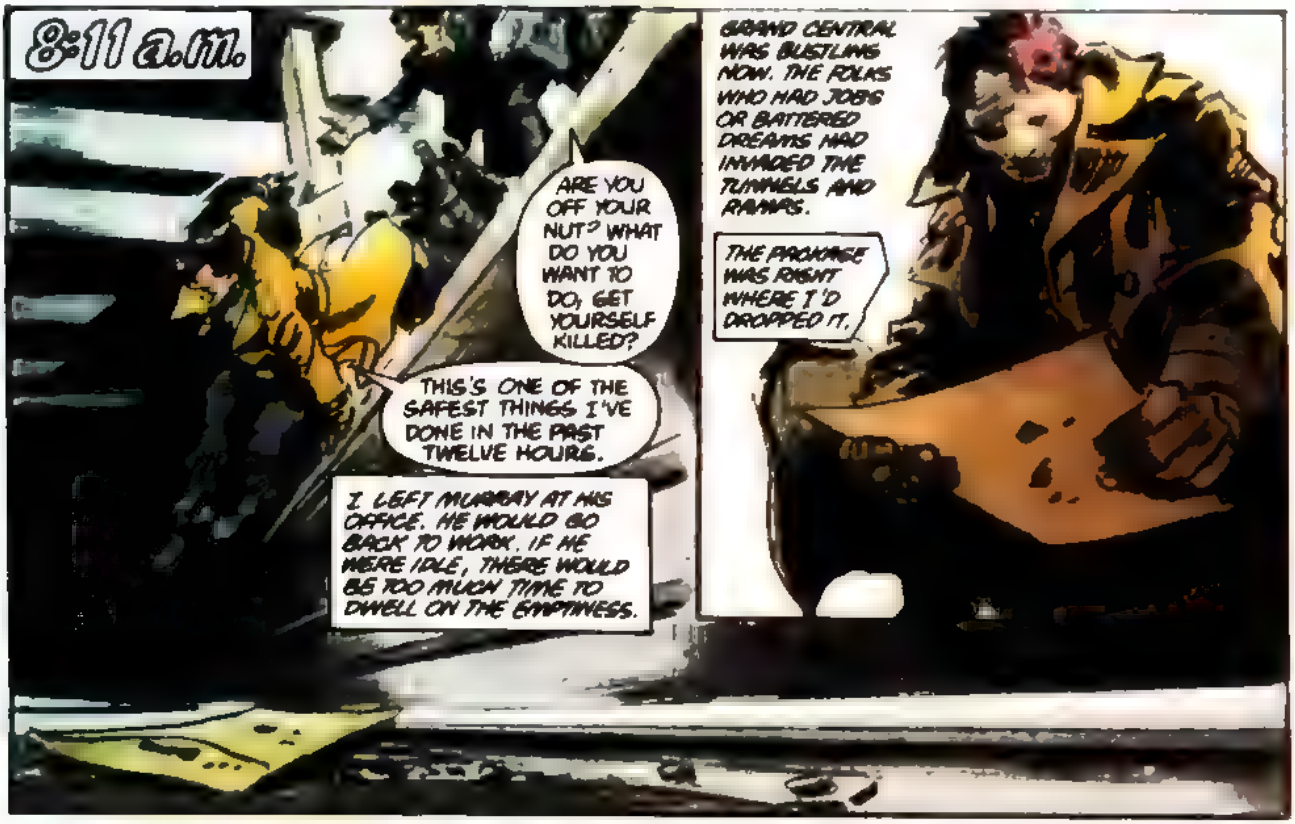

ZOMBIES ARE SUPPOSED TO GO BACK TO THEIR GRAVES, OR SOME SUCH DAMN FOOL THING, BUT LOOKING AT MAS BOOKS IS NOT ONE OF THE DAMN FOOL THINGS THEY DO.
EVEN WITH BLURRY VISION I RECOGNIZED HIM. SMALL, REPTILE-UGLY EYES. MOURNFUL MOUTH

HERE'S ONE OF THEM. KNOBBY "MEOW" HALLIHAN. DROVE THE GETAWAY CAR
YEH. I KNOW HIM. THEY TAUNTED HIM "MEOW" BECAUSE HE LOVES CATS.
HATES PEOPLE, LOVES CATS.

KNOBBY DOES A LOT OF WORK FOR ARTHUR ROTHBERG, A BIG-TIME JEWISH GANGSTER. BUT THIS DOESN'T SMELL RIGHT. ROTHBERG IS NORMALLY VERY GENTEEL. HE DOESN'T GO IN FOR THIS ROUGH STUFF.

HE'S MORE A DISPENSER OF WISDOM TO VARIOUS GANGSTERS. SOMETIMES A LIAISON BETWEEN HOODS AND POLITICIANS THEY WASH EACH OTHERS' HANDS, IF YOU GET MY DRIFT.
LT. ABRAHAMS!
SORRY, SIR BUT A CALL JUST CAME IN... IT'S ABOUT YOUR WIFE
THEY HAD TO RUSH HER TO THE HOSPITAL... SHE WAS HEMORRHAG-ING!
HIS FACE WENT PALE HE LOOKED TEN YEARS OLDER HIS EYES DULLED.
NO HOPE HE KNEW IT WAS BAD
THE 4TH OF JULY WOULD ALWAYS BE A TIME OF PAIN FOR THE ABRAHAMS FROM THIS MOMENT ON.
WE WEREN'T KIDS ANYMORE, CELEBRATING AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE WITH CHERRY BOMBS, HURTLING TIN CANS INTO THE AIR WHILE WE SHRIEKED WITH LAUGHTER
I WENT WITH HIM HE WAS MY FRIEND.
IF THE WORD IS TO BE ANYTHING MORE THAN A WORD, THEN YOU MUST BE THERE WHEN THEIR WORLD COMES TO AN END.
ELSE YOU AREN'T THEIR FRIEND

I DOZED. HAD BAD DREAMS THAT MADE ME NOT WANT TO SLEEP. JOYCE. LIZZIE CRANSTON. MY FATHER DIED IN A HOSPITAL THAT SMELLED JUST LIKE THIS.
I KNEW AS SOON AS I SAW HIS FACE.
I WANTED TO LOOK AWAY. I WANTED TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE. THERE WAS TOO MUCH PAIN.
SHE LOST THE CHILD, NATE!
I WANTED TO SAY THE RIGHT THING, BUT THERE WAS NO RIGHT THING TO SAY.
I'M AFRAID SHE ISN'T GOING TO BE ABLE TO TAKE THIS.
LIKE, SHE THINKS SHE'S NOT WHOLE... NOT A COMPLETE WOMAN. THAT SHE'S BEING PUNISHED FROM UP HIGH... BY GOD--
--FOR SOMETHING SHE DOESN'T UNDERSTAND
I FEEL IT, TOO I WANT TO ASK SOMEONE FOR A REASON SOMETHING TERRIBLE LIKE THIS... YOU WANT SOMEONE TO TELL YOU WHY IT HAS TO BE.
BUT WHAT DO YOU GET?
SILENCE
JUST
SILENCE.
THE BABY... STILL... GONE
AND WHAT'S LEFT?
GUILT
YOU KNOW YOU DIDN'T DO ANY-THING BUT YOU STILL FEEL GUILTY


8:11 a.m.
ARE YOU OFF YOUR NUT? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO, GET YOURSELF KILLED?
THIS'S ONE OF THE SAFEST THINGS I'VE DONE IN THE PAST TWELVE HOURS.
I LEFT MURRAY AT HIS OFFICE. HE WOULD GO BACK TO WORK. IF HE WERE IDLE, THERE WOULD BE TOO MUCH TIME TO DWELL ON THE EMPTINESS.
GRAND CENTRAL WAS BUSTLING NOW. THE FOLKS WHO HAD JOBS OR BATTERED DREAMS HAD INVADED THE TUNNELS AND RAMPS.
THE PACKAGE WAS RIGHT WHERE I'D DROPPED IT.

8:29 a.m.
GRAMERCY PARK WEST WAS QUIET IN THE EARLY JULY HEAT. THE RAGE IN MY HEAD WAS NOT QUIET, IT SHOUTED THROUGH MY WHOLE BODY. THE BEAST WANTED OUT, SCREAMING, VIOLENTLY OUT! PEOPLE COULD DIE IN THIS KIND OF QUIET, BUT IT WASN'T DISCUSSED DURING BREAKFAST.
JOHN MALONE HAD HIS BOILED EGG IN EXPENSIVE PORCELAIN. HE PROBABLY NEVER SAW THE EXQUISITELY HAND-PAINTED DESIGN.
HE DIDN'T LOOK LIKE HE ENJOYED BOILED EGGS.

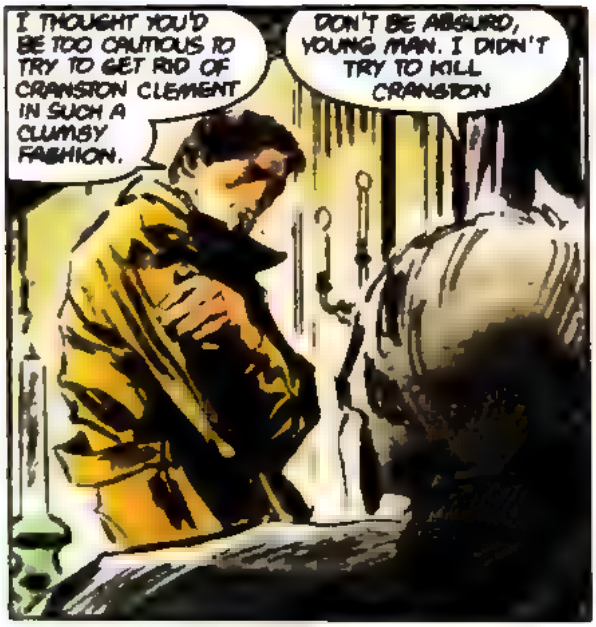
SPLOP

I TRIED TO STOP HIM, SIR. HE PUSHED HIS WAY PAST
GET HIM OUT OF HERE, MALONE, IF YOU DON'T WANT HIM TO SEE WHAT'S INSIDE THERE
YOU'RE EXCUSED, REVITCH.

I'VE BEEN EXPECTING YOU.

I'M SURE YOU HAVE.
SOMEHOW, DESPITE YOUR ROTTEN DISPOSITION, I DIDN'T THINK I'D FIND IT WAS YOU WHO'D BEEN DEALING WITH ARTHUR ROTHBERG.

THAT'S YOU, MALONE, STANDING OUTSIDE THE HUNGRY UNICORN RESTAURANT, LOOKING VERY CHUMMY WITH MR. ROTHBERG.


I THOUGHT YOU'D BE TOO CAUTIOUS TO TRY TO GET RID OF CRANSTON CLEMENT IN SUCH A CLUMSY FASHION.
DON'T BE ABSURD, YOUNG MAN. I DIDN'T TRY TO KILL CRANSTON

YOU DON'T HAVE TO TAKE MY WORD FOR IT. THE NIGHT YOU WERE WITH CRANSTON AND CLAIM TO HAVE SAVED HIS LIFE, I WAS WITH YOUR CLIENT, MY NIECE, AMANDA.
CHECK WITH HER... UNLESS YOU SUSPECT HER OF COMPLICITY IN SOME DEVIOUS SCHEME.

AND MY BEING WITH MR. ROTHBERG IS NOT AS INCRIMINATING AS YOU SEEM TO IMPLY. GRANTED, I WOULD NOT WANT THESE PHOTOGRAPHS REVEALED SINCE MY COMPANY IS INVOLVED IN DELICATE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE GOVERNMENT.

TAKE A GANDER. THERE'S CORRESPONDENCE IN THERE, TOO. CRANSTON BROKE THEM ON JUNE 22ND, THE DAY HE DUCKED OUT ON ME. THAT'S WHY HE CHARGED IN HERE.
AND NO SOAP ABOUT THESE PICTURES, MALONE!

THEY MIGHT NOT BE INCRIMINATING IN A COURT OF LAW, BUT THEY WOULD SULLY THE REPUTATION OF YOUR COMPANY AND FAMILY NAME.

YOU LIKE TO HIDE ALL THE MUD UNDER EXPENSIVE CARPETS
YOU ARE A MOST CONDESCENDING CHAP.
HEAR ME OUT. I AM SURE YOU ARE AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTIES OVERSEAS. TODAY'S HEADLINES, FOR INSTANCE, ARE CONCERNED WITH HITLER'S BLOOD PURGE.

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING. YOU'RE THINKING HITLER IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE GLOBE TO MOST AMERICANS HE IS A FUNNY STRIP CARTOON.

BUT THERE ARE SOME FARSIGHTED INDIVIDUALS WHO REALIZE HE ISN'T ALL THAT FAR AWAY THERE ARE SOME WITH VISION WHO THINK THAT EVENTUALLY THIS WAR OVERSEAS COULD INVOLVE THE UNITED STATES
THERE ARE SOME MEMBERS OF CONGRESS WHO WOULD NOT ADMIT IT PUBLICLY--

--IT MIGHT COST THEM RE-ELECTION, BUT IN THEIR HEARTS THEY KNOW IT IS PRUDENT TO CONSIDER AN INCREASE IN OUR MILITARY MIGHT. NOW, IF THERE IS AN UPCOMING WAR, AIR POWER IS GOING TO PLAY A DECISIVE PART

I FLEW A PLANE IN THE GREAT WAR. WHAT WE HAD TO SEND UP INTO THE AIR IN THOSE DAYS WAS FLIMSY IN COMPARISON WITH WHAT THEY HAVE TODAY.

WELL, WE'RE SPEAKING THE SAME LANGUAGE HERE
I DOUBT IT.
LISTEN PART AND PARCEL OF THIS NEW INTEREST IN AVIATION IS THE INVENTION OF PARACHUTES

NOW.. THE MALONE COMPANY IS A MODEST LITTLE RIBBON BUSINESS.
SQUP
MODEST YOU DO HAVE A WAY WITH WORDS WITH YOUR ABILITY TO STRETCH THE MEANING OF WORDS, YOU SHOULD HAVE BEEN A POLITICIAN YOURSELF.
DON'T ANSWER ME, YOUNG MAN!
IT'S INCREDIBLE. FOR THE PAST COUPLE OF WEEKS I'VE BEEN CALLED "KID" AND "YOUNG MAN." YOU'LL HAVE ME BELIEVING I FOUND THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH.
NOTHING AT FIRST GLANCE. WHO WOULD ASSOCIATE RIBBONS WITH PARACHUTES?
NO ONE!
BUT THE MACHINES USED TO PRODUCE VARIOUS TYPES OF RIBBONS WORK ON MUCH THE SAME PRINCIPLE AS THOSE THAT WORK WITH THE SILK OF PARACHUTES.
SPZZZZ
YES, VERY HUMOROUS, I'M SURE.
JUST WHAT HAS ALL THIS PARACHUTE LECTURE GOT TO DO WITH RIBBONS?
WITH MODIFICATIONS, WITH GOVERNMENT COMMISSIONS, CONVERSION TO PRODUCING "A" QUALITY PARACHUTES .. TOP OF THE LINE!... IS ASSURED.
BUT... IF YOU WERE TO INTRODUCE ALL THIS NASTY INNUENDO, IT WOULD CREATE UNWANTED, SORDID PUBLICITY.
SUCH EXPOSURE COULD CONCEIVABLY RUIN OUR CHANCES FOR THAT CONTRACT, WHICH WE HAVE SO CAREFULLY CULTIVATED.
FOR THAT REASON--
--AND THAT REASON ONLY--

--NOT BECAUSE I FEAR YOU CAN ACCUSE ME OF ATTEMPTING TO KILL CRANSTON CLEMENT--

--I AM WILLING TO OFFER YOU A SUBSTANTIAL AMOUNT OF CASH.

YOU TAKE IT AND WE'LL CONSIDER THE MATTER SETTLED.

AND REST ASSURED, I MET WITH THIS SLIGHTLY UNSAVORY CHARACTER, ROTH-BERG, NOT FOR HIS CRIMINAL CONNECTIONS, BUT HIS POLITICAL CONNECTIONS.

IT WAS ROTHBERG WHO ARRANGED MY MEETING WITH THE GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE--

--IT WAS ROTHBERG WHO PREPARED THE INTRODUCTORY LETTER YOU WERE RIGHT, CRANSTON STOLE IT FROM MY SAFE.

MALONE RIBBONS WILL SUPPLY PARACHUTES FOR THE MILITARY, A WORTHWHILE AND PATRIOTIC PROGRAM, DON'T YOU AGREE?

PERHAPS YOUR CONCEPT OF WORTHWHILE AND PATRIOTIC IS DIFFERENT FROM MINE.

BUT NOT OUR FEELING ABOUT MONEY, AM I RIGHT?

FWIP

SPLUCK

MONEY IS THE ONE EQUALIZER AMONG MEN, THE ONE THING THEY AGREE UPON.

WE ALL HAVE A LOVE FOR THE BUCK YOU CAN FEEL IT, MR DUSK. THAT'S TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS. YOU COULD LIVE QUITE HANDSOMELY ON THAT.

NO MORE SQUALID LITTLE CASES. NO MORE DEPRESSING OFFICE.

YOU CAN QUIT BEING A SHABBY TOUGH GUY.
I STARED AT THE STACK OF CRISP, NEW BILLS. I THOUGHT OF WHAT THAT SMALL BUNDLE OF GREEN REPRESENTED.
WEALTH
FREEDOM.
POWER
REACH OUT AND CARESS IT. TRACE YOUR FINGERS OVER THOSE JEFFERSONIAN STARES.
THIS MONEY IS A PROMISE, COLD AND HARD AND FINAL
IT IS A SEDUCTRESS WHO WILL LEAD YOU AWAY FROM ANY VALUES YOU EVER THOUGHT YOU HAD--
--WHOSE PROMISE CAN LEAVE YOU AS EMPTY AS YESTERDAY'S TRASHCAN.
I ALMOST LAUGHED.
HOW THE HELL COULD ANYTHING THAT TOOK UP SO LITTLE SPACE BE ALL OF THAT?
TAKE IT, A VOICE SAID TO ME. TAKE IT AND WALK OUT NO MORE GETTING SHOT AT NO MORE POUNDING YOUR HEAD AGAINST THE WALL.
TAKE IT, AND YOU'RE DEAD, ANOTHER VOICE SAID.
TAKE IT AND EVERYTHING YOU EVER STOOD FOR WILL BEGIN TO DIE, RIGHT THIS MOMENT, BEFORE YOU EVEN LEAVE THIS ROOM!
I KNEW MALONE WOULD NEVER UNDERSTAND.
I KNEW THERE WERE THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN BEYOND THESE WINDOWS--
--WHO WOULD THINK I WAS OFF MY NUT FOR EVEN CONTEMPLATING SUCH A THOUGHT.

PERHAPS NO ONE WOULD UNDERSTAND.
IT DIDN'T REALLY MATTER. I UNDERSTOOD
AND THAT WAS ENOUGH.
I THOUGHT HE MIGHT SCRAMBLE OUT THE WINDOW AFTER THE MONEY, CLINGING TO THE WALLS LIKE SOME DEMENTED, CORRUPT VERSION OF HAROLD LLOYD.
GOOD GOD ALMIGHTY! IT NEVER CROSSED MY MIND YOU'D BE A FULL-FLEDGED LUNATIC!
THAT WAS REAL, GRADE-A AMERICAN MONEY!
I DIDN'T THINK YOU'D HAVE ANY OTHER KIND.
PARDON THE INTRUSION, MR MALONE.
WHO THE HELL ARE YOU MEN?
WE HAVE A MUTUAL FRIEND.. MR ROTHBERG.
HOW DARE YOU BARGE IN HERE UNANNOUNCED!AAAA
YOU SHUT YOUR YAP.
YOU DON'T TELL ME NOTHING!

MY BOSS... AS OF THE DAY YOU STARTED DEALING WITH HIM... YOUR BOSS, TOO... HE TELLS US HOW IT LAYS.
HE'S GOING TO MAKE YOUR FAMILY LOTS OF DOUGH, AND YOU'RE GOING TO SHARE IT WITH HIM.
BUT WHEN IT COMES TO ENFORCEMENT, MR. ROTHBERG ALWAYS LISTENS TO ME. THAT MEANS YOU LISTEN TO ME.
MALONE LOOKED LIKE A VAUDEVILLE HOOFER STANDING IN A SPOT-LIGHT, SWEATING GREASEPAINT!
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO HIM? YOU CAN'T KILL HIM HERE! I'D..
...I'D BE INVOLVED IN THE WORST KIND OF SCANDAL!
IT'S NOT GOING TO LOOK LIKE MURDER. IT'S GOING TO LOOK LIKE HE ACCIDENTALLY KILLED HIMSELF.
YOU SEE, THIS GET-UP'S GOTTEN TOO PUBLIC. MY FAULT, REALLY. I TAKE THE RAP FOR THAT!
THING WAS, I KNEW HE'D FOUND THE STUFF CRANSTON WAS USING TO BLACKMAIL YOU WITH, THAT'S WHY I POPPED OFF AT HIM WITH THE CHOPPER AT GRAND CENTRAL.
I KNEW AS SOON AS HE COULD PLACE YOU AND MR. ROTHBERG TOGETHER HE'D BE COMING THIS WAY. SO NOW WE PUT SOME HEAT ON HIM.
TAKE OFF YOUR CLOTHES, PEEPER. YOU DO IT RIGHT AWAY, OR I PUT A TATTOO OF YOUR NAME ALL OVER YOUR CHEST AND FIGURE OUT HOW TO CLEAN UP THE MESS LATER.
NOW LET'S SAY, MR. MALONE, YOU GOT PLANS FOR THE DAY... YOU GO ABOUT THEM... VISIT WITH YOUR FAMILY... AND WHEN YOU COME BACK--FOR SHAME! --WHAT DO YOU FIND BUT MR. DUSK CROAKED IN YOUR STEAM ROOM.

BUT HOW DO I EXPLAIN...
WHAT HE'S DOING HERE? SIMPLE. YOU TELL THE COPPERS YOU PATCHED THINGS UP WITH THE PEEPER. YOU TELL THEM YOU OFFERED HIM THE FREEDOM OF YOUR PLACE WHILE YOU WERE OUT CELEBRATING.
YOU TELL THEM HE SAID SOMETHING ABOUT WANTING TO TRY OUT THE STEAM ROOM. BUT YOU NEVER IMAGINED HE WOULD ARDOLE WITH THE CONTROLS. THE IGNORAMOUS SET THEM TOO HIGH.
WE'VE GOT PEOPLE ON THE FORCE WHO WILL MAKE SURE HIS PRINTS ARE FOUND ON THE DIAL. THEY'LL MAKE IT EASIER FOR EVERYONE TO ACCEPT THE OBVIOUS--
THE POOR CHUMP GOT CARELESS AND PAID FOR HIS SINS.
YOU FIGURE HE MUST'VE FALLEN ASLEEP WITH THE STEAM ON, AND WHEN HE WOKE, HE PANICKED.
HE TRIPPED THE CATCH SOMEHOW, AND HE GOT SCALDED, POOR BABY.
THAT'S MUCH BETTER THAN HIM DISAPPEARING. HE'S GOT A COP FRIEND WHO'D REALLY START LOOKING INTO YOUR DOINGS IF HE WASN'T TO BE HEARD FROM AGAIN.
HEY, KNOBBY, WANT TO GO BEND AN ELBOW SOMEWHERE?
BETTER NOT. GOT TO GET BACK UP TO 132ND ST. BEFORE THE WIFE HAS ME FOR SHARK BAIT.
RECEDING VOICES.
AND THE HEAT WAS MURDEROUS!

February 1985.

"Apple Peddlers Die At Noon, Part 3," was well under way. Gene Colan was bringing "Lice" Williams to life in the old Grand Central Station. John Costanza had already handed in lettered pages of "Apple Peddlers, Part 1." The book was actually ahead of schedule. This isn't a miracle on the scale of parting the waters of the Red Sea, but in the comic book business it's cause for celebration.

Mortality had been whispering to me in the winter days. A shortness of breath. Probably sinuses. A slight pain across the back of the shoulders. Probably from playing on the monkey bars at the park with my son, Rob Roy.

One night in the early morning hours, the whisper became a shout, a shout that brought adrenaline rushing with the speed of blood-pulse, leaving me wide awake and staring at the dark.

It wasn't sinuses. Forget about the monkey bars.

It was a slight problem with my heart. It meant that I was going to have to slow down, treat these books as less than life or death. Geez, the worst thing might be that I couldn't wrestle with my old friend, Dean Mullaney, anymore. As Connie, in the old Milton Caniff TERRY AND THE PIRATES comic strips from Nathan's time, would say, "Not so hotsy doodle!"

Rich Bruning started working as DC's Art Director during the first couple of weeks while I was being a "good boy" and doing everything the doctor said. If somebody called and said the newest issue of SABRE was going to be late once again, I just let it ride.

Rich had come out from the West Coast to find the NATHANIEL DUSK book dropped in his lap. The first issue was four pages short and needed the prose section. That piece was the first thing I wrote after getting the go-ahead from the doctor.

Rich called one night about eight or nine o'clock. Staff hours in comic book land often extend way after the five o'clock hour. He said he had all these quotes and dedications and needed that text piece. But, in addition, no one was sure what was going where. Answering "where" was easy. Asking "when" was harder.

I said, "You need this text piece when?"

"How about tomorrow?" Rich answered. Art directors always need things tomorrow.

I was hoping he meant a figurative tomorrow.

"You don't really mean tomorrow tomorrow, right?"

He meant tomorrow. When I wrote that piece, I hadn't even met up with Rich. It would be sometime in April before I actually stopped in his office. There certainly wasn't any way that I could write about his contributions of design to this book, because when the material he wanted "tomorrow" was due, Rich hadn't begun work on the book. But those text pages and covers were all designed by Rich. I know he spent extra time working on giving the book its distinctive outer look, one that would blend with the interior material. And I know he had the pressure that comes not only from a new job, but having to handle so many of the other titles that come from DC. And even though I didn't quite get that first text piece in on the "tomorrow" date, and Rich was probably convinced that the "nice but difficult guy" was not Nate, we were still managing to stay ahead of deadline.

Well, this sort of thing is too good to last forever. It is a Catch-22 factor in this business that if one book is ahead, that title can wait because there are twenty other books that are late. And by the time the work is done on those twenty titles, the book that was early is suddenly late.

The decision on who would color the book was one of the last creative decisions made. Tom Ziuko was going to return as colorist for the second series. I couldn't write much about Thomas in that first book, since, to be honest, I hadn't seen any of the pages yet. Tom hadn't started coloring the book.

You have all had a chance to see Tom's coloring on this book. The first impression a reader has when glancing through a book is of the coloring. A bad coloring job can kill a project. I've had it happen in the past. I know how important the coloring is in those final stages. And I want to tip the old topper, the high hat, to Tom for his patience, for inviting me over to his place to discuss the approach to the coloring, for capturing the tone and mood.

But mostly for being one of the nicest men to work with.

Thomas not only gave up a lot of other work to devote his full attention to DUSK, but he also got together with Bob LeRose, who took extra time to make sure Gene's pencils were shot for their true shadings of grays and blacks.

Last of the end notes and thank-yous.

The shouts of mortality are back to whispers, with an occasional sharper tone. I want to thank my old buddy, Dean Mullaney, for giving me a place to stay one night during a convention where I was promoting the DUSK book, one of those nights when the whisper had taken a sharper tone. I love you, Dean.

And thanks to Peggy May, for making sure I got to the plane on time and setting up all the promotional details on the book.

The hat is tipped because all these people helped make this book look the way it does, and helped it survive.

It's July now. Almost as hot as Nate's days in 1934. My daughter, Lauren, is out from the West Coast for the month, 14 years old, and bright like sunlight in August. She and Rob Roy are already in Manhattan, waiting for my arrival. The woman of my life, who quiets even the whispers, Marsha, is with them. We're going to take Lauren to the Peace Fountain at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, where her brother, who is only six, by the way, has one of his sculptures bronzed and placed about the Peace Fountain. His sis has got to see a thing like that. If you're ever strolling around upper Manhattan, check it out. Meantime, before I get there, I have Rich Bruning waiting for me at the DC offices and he doesn't care how many complimentary things I said in this piece, he wants this today. Because, of course, today is tomorrow, and if he doesn't get this piece today, he will make sure everyone knows who the "nice but difficult" guy is.

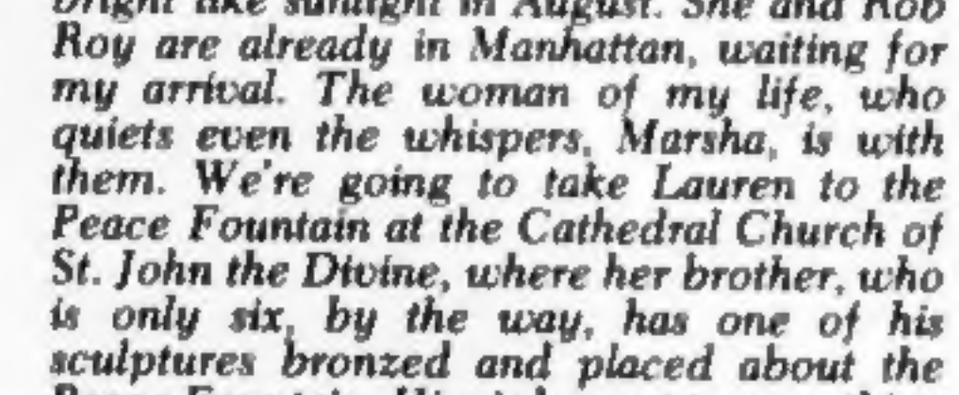
Okay, Rich. Final end note. I've nothing left to write on this series at all, right?

Right, Rich?

Ah, well. Per the usual...

Be kind to each other, be kind to yourselves.

And hang in there.



Don McGregor
July 1985

ENDING
Postscript
Tip of the Hat...

"It's a fine job indeed

and both Don McGregor and DC Comics
should be proud of NATHANIEL DUSK II."

Evan Hunter a/k/a Ed McBain
Author, 87th Precinct Series

"Ostensibly, NATHANIEL DUSK is a comic book series in the hard-boiled detective genre—except, it's got sex, blood and complex, mature relationships. Sound familiar? Not in a comic book it doesn't. Anyway, mix this Mulligan Stew into the backdrop of Depression Era New York, add a violent Taxi Cab strike to darken the tone, and you got—a comic book?
NATHANIEL DUSK is told in the classic pulp-serial style of the 30's and the historical details are uncannily real. Colan's superb artwork gets better from issue to issue and the covers are spectacular. McGregor's writing is authentic and tough when it needs to be tough—but touches on real emotions when it comes to the relationships he has woven his characters into. No-holds-barred."

Michael Part
I Love A Mystery Magazine

"Cast from the same hard-boiled mold as Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, Nathaniel Dusk has come to two-fisted, trench-coated life through the efforts of Don McGregor and Gene Colan. Hopefully, they'll continue to make his capers darker and more dangerous than a dozen Maltese Falcons."

Jim Steranko
Publisher, Prevue Magazine

CRIME / MYSTERY